

Environmental Advisory Council
Tuesday, May 24, 2022
Virtual

EAC members present –D. Beane, C. Curran-Myers, S. Crothers, W. Vitale, A. Sellers

Others present – S. Smith, M. DuGuay, D. Chesson, V. Erenberg, M. Goodman-Hinnershitz

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Beane called the meeting to order at 12:02 pm. He noted that a quorum was present.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

EAC WEB PAGE

Mr. DuGuay, the City's webmaster, introduced himself to the EAC and provided his background. He stated that he is glad to work with the EAC and that he has always been an advocate for environmental issues.

Mr. DuGuay suggested that the newsletter not be in Word format and suggested using Mail Chimp. He stated that he has met with Ms. Chesson and the goal is to grow the EAC's contact base. He stated that this growth is difficult but is worth the effort. He stated that Mail Chimp allows the EAC to have up to 2,000 contacts and to send up to six blasts per month at no cost. He stated that he is willing to build a template for the blasts. He stated that Mail Chimp email blasts will not be considered spam.

Mr. DuGuay stated that email activity can be monitored to determine if the recipients interact with the blasts. He stated that this information can be used to improve engagement. He explained that the email messages can drive activity to the EAC webpage or any other information that is included. He stated that this will ensure that readers can find additional information about the email topic.

Mr. DuGuay explained that the EAC's page can include whatever the EAC wishes but that it must stay within the City's template. He stated that he would build out the page with additional links on the menu. He encouraged additional

information and stated that he is honored to be involved to help preserve the environment.

Ms. Chesson noted the need for an email account and a person to manage the program.

Mr. Vitale stated that this is very informative.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz agreed with the use of a newsletter. She stated that Reading has some very significant environmental issues before it including Bernhart's and residents not connecting to the environment. She expressed the belief that Reading should tell its story and that its story should not be tied to the local media.

Mr. DuGuay agreed that the local media should get its information directly from the City.

Ms. Smith questioned if an EAC@readingpa.gov-type email address would work for Mail Chimp. Mr. DuGuay stated that he can set up this email and have messages delivered to several inboxes.

Ms. Sellers agreed that this would be a good approach. She questioned if Mail Chimp blasts could also be integrated into social media posts. Mr. DuGuay stated that the blasts can also be social media posts. He stated that this would expand the reach of the blasts. He also noted the need to create a social media account and to have someone monitor activity and comments.

Ms. Sellers questioned if Ms. Chesson would have these responsibilities. Mr. DuGuay stated that once he sets everything up one person can draft the blast and everything else in the process is automated. He stated that this will reduce the time required and the cost. He stated that the mock-up done by Ms. Chesson was done very well.

Mr. Vitale noted the need to monitor the accounts. Mr. DuGuay agreed. He expressed the belief that monitoring the accounts to improve the engagement and grow followers is important. He also suggested using QR codes within the blasts.

Mr. DuGuay explained that Mail Chimp will send an email to verify the address when someone is added to the database to ensure that it is not a bot or fake email. He stated that it can also be challenging to get people to open and read the email

blasts and stated that there is a free online tool available to improve subject lines to increase readership. He explained that social media posts will also need to be monitored to ensure that they are posted during times when followers are able to engage with them before they are lost on their walls.

Ms. Sellers questioned doing real time posting. Mr. DuGuay stated that this is possible on social media only.

Mr. Vitale noted the need to determine who will lead this project. He stated that Ms. Chesson's time with the EAC ends in June. He noted the need for the EAC to determine next steps. Mr. DuGuay stated that he is able to assist and is willing to train those who will be managing the program. He stated that if a person is able to use Word, they are able to do this.

Ms. Sellers stated that it is important to determine who will manage the program. She stated that EAC members have limited time and that they are volunteers.

Mr. DuGuay stated that he has a network of experts that may be willing to assist.

Ms. Curran-Myers suggested that Ms. Chesson may be willing to stay beyond June with additional financial remuneration. Ms. Chesson stated that she enjoys working with the EAC and would be interested in extending her work.

Ms. Chesson stated that the EAC is currently using the City's main social media pages and that posts are approved and posted through Mr. Crespo.

Mr. DuGuay screen shared a Google map that is owned by the City. He stated that he can create markers on the map. He stated that if the marker is clicked on, a window will open that can show photos, describe the project and include links for additional information. He stated that the GPS coordinates can also be included so that people can visit locations. He stated that there is no cost to update the map except his time. He suggested a separate meeting about this part of the project.

Ms. Sellers stated that she loves the map. She questioned if information can be pulled from other sites. Mr. DuGuay stated that if the information is public he can pull it from other sites. He stated that generally businesses approve sharing their information because it will increase web traffic back to them. He noted the need to get permission from private entities.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that this type of map has been discussed for 5 – 6 years and she is delighted that Mr. DuGuay is willing to assist. She explained that the EAC is hoping to showcase green infrastructure projects so people can see them firsthand and get familiar and enthusiastic about them to increase momentum to have greener habits.

Ms. Sellers stated that she is very interested in connectivity and safe routes to cycle. She questioned if these could be added to the map. Mr. DuGuay stated that they can.

Mr. Vitale suggested starting with public places. He questioned next steps and who would collect the information and provide it to Mr. DuGuay. Ms. Chesson stated that she will need the email addresses to get started and she will manage Mail Chimp and social media and can provide information for the map.

Ms. Curran-Myers questioned if Ms. Crothers would be interested in working on these items with Ms. Chesson. She noted Ms. Crothers extensive professional network. Ms. Crothers stated that she is willing to assist.

Mr. DuGuay thanked the EAC for this opportunity and stated that he is excited to see these projects move forward. Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she is delighted that the City has Mr. DuGuay. She stated that she is also excited to see these projects move forward and stated that she is grateful for Mr. DuGuay's assistance.

Mr. DuGuay stated that he was born and bred in Reading is a proud Red Knight.

Ms. Sellers expressed the belief that the blasts and map would also assist with economic development.

Mr. Vitale stated that the EAC is open to other ideas that Mr. DuGuay may have.

Mr. DuGuay requested that Ms. Smith share his email address with the Committee to keep communication open.

Ms. Curran-Myers noted the need for the EAC to determine what information is shared. She noted the need for real engagement on the draft Climate Action Plan and to reach new people.

Mr. DuGuay disconnected from the meeting at this time.

Mr. Beane stated that that was a great discussion.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Ms. Sellers moved, seconded by Mr. Vitale, to approve the April 26, 2022 meeting summary as written. Motion carried unanimously.

RAIN GARDENS

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that Ms. Ayers-Fisher is working on rain gardens but that she is very busy.

Ms. Sellers stated that she saw an email about federal funding that is available for traffic calming projects. She stated that it is a grant and noted her concern that Reading doesn't have a current Comprehensive Plan. She stated that bump outs, tree trenches and other BMPs can be expensive and this would be a good way to fund them.

Mr. Vitale suggested that Ms. Sellers send this information to Ms. Ayers-Fisher for follow up. He stated that the RFP for the rain garden on Museum Rd is in process and that momentum for the project is growing. He stated that there is a smaller triangle in front of St. Joseph's Church at the N 8th St and N 9th St intersection that would be a candidate for a rain garden.

Ms. Smith added to the chat that there are many traffic triangles in the City that may be appropriate.

Ms. Curran-Myers agreed. She noted the need to grow a pilot garden that would be used as the foundation for obtaining additional grant funding.

Mr. Vitale stated that former Mayor Bloomberg did this in New York City. He stated that these projects change the character of neighborhoods. He stated that in NYC some triangles became green spaces and others received bollards around them with a food cart and tables inside.

Ms. Sellers stated that Washington DC has done similar projects. She stated that DC has also added bike lanes. She noted the need to get the conversation started and noted the need for a good Comprehensive Plan. She stated that she is a big picture person and visualizes a map showing flood prone areas, the direction of streets, green areas, etc.

Ms. Erenberg stated that Urban Ag funding may be available for installing rain gardens or pollinator gardens. She stated that she is interested in working on this project as a community partner. She stated that the projects would improve water and soil quality.

Ms. Sellers noted the need for urban gardens in areas where they will be used. She noted the need for connectivity of the City's park system. She stated that NYC has reduced the height of fences around their parks to better connect the parks to the surrounding neighborhood and the tree-lined streets. She stated that Reading already has many tree-lined streets but that there could always be more.

Mr. Beane suggested looking at the two triangles near Reading High School.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz disconnected from the meeting at this time.

Ms. Sellers stated that if these projects are done well they become talking points.

Mr. Vitale agreed that there are many traffic triangles that can be evaluated.

Ms. Smith added to the chat that one of the triangles near Reading High is privately owned.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the owner can be approached but suggested starting with City-owned triangles. She also noted the need to engage the City's grant writer.

PLASTIC BAG BAN

Mr. Beane stated that there are several legal issues in the Philadelphia legislation that he is researching.

ACT 2 DATABASE

Mr. Beane stated that the summer intern at Liberty Environmental has started. He stated that he is scheduling a meeting with himself, Ms. Curran-Myers, Mr. Fetterman, and Ms. Millman to discuss the project. He stated that this project is tied to the non-use aquifer designation. He stated that several wells remain in the City and that Council approval is needed for the aquifer designation.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that this project is also an environmental justice issue. She stated that there are legitimate citizen concerns with the safety of former

industrial sites in Reading. She noted the need to ensure that this database is checked when there are land use changes at these sites. She noted the need for appropriate land use. She stated that most Act 2 issues are handled privately and this would make the information public.

Mr. Beane stated that environmental justice is now mandated by all PA DEP programs.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the EAC has made formal comment on the DEP's new environmental justice policy. She stated that the new policy will also add compliance and enforcement of environmental justice. She stated that the need for the database was part of the comments made and it was requested that the database be created by DEP. She stated that DEP should follow up with the EAC about the comments.

NATIVE SPECIES DAY – JUNE 17, 2022

Ms. Curran-Myers suggested that the next invasive species walk be done in conjunction with this Day. She suggested that this Day be promoted on social media to reduce invasive species and increase native plants. She stated that she is working with Ms. Ayers-Fisher. She noted her hope that Mr. Beane could lead the walk in Hessian Camp.

Mr. Beane stated that Hessian Camp has a neighborhood association and he will work with them to coordinate the walk.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that the walk can include Pendora Park, Egelman's Park and the connection areas.

Ms. Sellers stated that many residents may not be aware that they have invasive species on their property.

Mr. Vitale suggested posting a photo on social media of Mr. Beane removing his barberry bushes.

Ms. Chesson suggested adding invasive species information to the EAC webpage.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that this is a great suggestion. She agreed that spreading invasive species is unintentional and noted the need for additional education. She

stated that she has seen less yard waste being dumped in the preserve after her walk in Hampden Heights.

COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE

Mr. Vitale stated that today's discussion with Mr. DuGuay began in this committee. He stated that there is a meeting on Friday. He stated that Ms. Chesson will begin focusing on the email blasts and social media and Mr. Nazario will do outreach and has been planning events with partners – Goggleworks and the library.

Mr. Vitale stated that the committee is now working on mechanics and concepts. He noted the need to be where people already are. The messages are being developed along with how to engage people to change their habits.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that she is attending an event at the Goggleworks garden in May to meet with Ms. Lopez and to observe. She stated that the EAC will participate more fully at their June event.

Mr. Vitale stated that he has heard from Ms. Ayers-Fisher that Ms. Chesson's and Mr. Nazario's work has reduced her workload. He stated that the Library book club will discuss an environmental book. He stated that there is also work on a film screening at the Goggleworks. He noted the need for discussion about using 2022 funds to continue the services of Ms. Chesson and Mr. Nazario.

NEW MEMBERS

Ms. Smith stated that City Council adopted a resolution removing Ms. Noviello from the EAC. She stated that this creates two vacancies on the EAC. She stated that there is one application pending.

Mr. Vitale noted the need to reiterate that the EAC is committed to having membership reflect the City's demographics, including age. He explained that it has been challenging to make that happen. He noted the need to understand why people are not volunteering to serve and suggested that this be a future discussion.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that Ms. Crothers has helped bring a younger perspective. She stated that the EAC is making progress. She stated that new members are also welcome on the committees. She noted the need for Latino members. She stated that two vacancies is a great way to increase the EAC's diversity.

Mr. Vitale stated that Ms. Chesson and Mr. Nazario have brought new, valuable perspectives forward.

BERNHART'S DAM

Ms. Smith stated that the dam has been lowered to the required level and the City is waiting for the DEP to perform its inspection. She stated that the City worked closely with professionals to manage the local wildlife.

Mr. Beane stated that the lake bottom is not a concern for lead. However, there are concerns with the lead level on the island which is now easily accessible. He stated that EPA will review the situation and additional remediation may be necessary. He stated that some superfund money may be available but Exide will not contribute. He stated that he will follow up with Mr. Dao before the EAC's next meeting.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that EPA has new funding available in environmental justice areas. She suggested that Mr. Dao assist the City with acquiring this funding.

BCTV

Mr. Beane noted the need to rethink this program. He stated that he is no longer able to devote the necessary time. He stated that the program airs every other month and noted his hope that a new member will agree to facilitate the programs in the future.

Ms. Curran-Myers suggested rolling the program into other outreach efforts. She suggested discussing this in more depth at the next meeting. She suggested dovetailing program topics with the other current initiatives including the map and the Climate Action Plan. She noted the need for a new focus for the program.

Mr. Beane agreed that the program has value and noted his hope that the program would continue.

Mr. Vitale stated that he also facilitates a monthly program. He agreed that it can be a struggle and stated that he also focuses on environmental issues and green building practices. He suggested that his program can also focus on EAC topics and suggested that perhaps both programs can be produced at the same time.

Ms. Curran-Myers expressed the belief that this is a great solution.

Mr. Beane stated that he will continue to work on programming until another member volunteers.

URBAN AGRICULTURE

Ms. Erenberg stated that she has no update. She stated that she is still learning and noted her appreciation to the EAC for their support.

Ms. Smith provided an update on the Oakbrook Community Garden:

- There are 27 active plots, 15 are being utilized by Oakbrook residents
- Barrio Alegria has scheduled dance classes and science classes at the garden
- Soul Contractors built a strawberry tower
- Boy Scouts have built compost bins and bamboo trellises
- A wheelchair accessible garden will be built in 2022 for use in 2023
- A midsummer garden party will be held on Friday, July 22

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that there is a greenhouse meeting tomorrow morning. She stated that she is working with City Planning Commission member Wayne Bealer on the Outreach Committee.

Ms. Sellers stated that gardening is therapeutic for brain injuries and described a situation where a person started a non-profit for those with brain injuries to garden. She stated that she designed the sewer system for this garden.

Mr. Beane stated that assisted living facilities also include raised gardens for residents.

Ms. Curran-Myers stated that there are two raised beds at the Albright College garden and one is currently available.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting date is Tuesday, June 28 at noon at Pendora Park lower pavilion, weather permitting. The pavilion is located at S 18th & Forest Sts and off street parking is available.

Ms. Crothers stated that she will be unable to attend the June meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 1:34 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by
Shelly Smith, CMC
Deputy City Clerk